

Learning English as a Foreign Language through the Listening in Mute Approach

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Abstract

One of the major problems faced by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners is the difficulty of decoding words and their meanings. While some are very early discouraged by the large amount of words to know before having a good command of this language, others struggle to progress in learning it because of the complexity of some words due to the multiplicity of their meanings. To overcome this problem, the author of this paper, after several years of research, tried to set up the listening in mute (Note 1) (low volume listening or soft listening) approach which refers to the action of the subconscious that has the capability of assimilating the language instead of the learner ((his or her) (Note 2) conscious mind) while the latter is sleeping in an environment where the English language is spoken in a low voice by native speakers.

Therefore, to examine the effectiveness of this approach, seven Beninese intermediate EFL learners were voluntarily recruited from three English Language Clubs (Note 3). It was recommended to each of them to take the habit of listening to a radio with a reduced volume in a low voice tuned to a channel broadcasting English programs before going to bed at night. The results were very impressive. Through individual interviews and focus groups, participants revealed that their six-month experience in these programs has helped them develop many skills such as listening, meaning-decoding and pronunciation.

Keywords

EFL learners, listening in mute, subconscious, native speakers

1. Introduction

The present study attempts to highlight the positive action of the subconscious in language learning. Through a series of experiments, it brings out the way this action is operated without the knowledge of the individual and suggests it for foreign language learning through the concept of *listening in mute* (low volume listening or soft listening).

1.1 Historical Background

Generally, the process of second or foreign language learning like English is not the same as the one used by the child. Simply put, the mechanism of the L1 acquisition does not always mirror the one of the L2, which makes foreign language learning more difficult than our native language. The major problems faced by foreign language learners are related to the learning approach they use. To have a good command of their target language, they need to adopt a learning strategy that could approximate the one they used instinctively to learn their own mother tongue. As shown by a lot of research, the language acquisition in the child begins from the day of his/her conception. Everything goes through the vibrations she/he receives through his/her mother. Since the first week of his/her conception until the day of his/her birth, the child perceives everything that happens around his/her mother through his/her *subconscious* (Note 4). At this stage of life, the human being is guided merely by his/her sub-consciousness (that is to say, the conscience asleep). One will later on talk of *consciousness* (Note 5) with him/her only when she/he reaches a certain maturity generally after the age of seven.

However, “The role of conscious and unconscious processes in second language learning is one of the problems under dispute in applied linguistics” (Jin, 2011, p. 126). As contended by Schmidt (1990) (cited in Jin, 2011, p. 126), “the notion of consciousness is both useful and possibly necessary in second language learning”. Yet, it is noteworthy to mention that “Conscious processes are important in second language learning, but unconscious processes should not be neglected in language comprehension and production, both of which contribute to second language learning” (Ibid). Similarly, Studies of classroom interaction in language classes at primary level show that pupils spend a large part of their time listening. Most teachers lay emphasis on exposure to a rich linguistic input and favour indirect subconscious learning... (Beaucamp, 2006, pp. 61-62).

The human being during his/her earliest childhood acquires intuitively any language including his/her native one. But once she/he reaches the *age of reason*, she/he seems to lose that faculty which however still remains innate in him/her. In fact, the acquisition of any language is done through a subconscious process though the learning occurs most of the time at the state of consciousness. Therefore, the conscious mind intervenes only to judge, analyze and assess the development or the progress of this process. The consciousness can also help the subconscious to decode a language. In other words, it can allow the identification of two different languages such as French and English and help to appreciate the level of control achieved in one or the other. In short, to register the new information in our permanent memory, it is necessary that we learn to reach our subconscious directly, bypassing the filter of the conscious mind (Carpenter, 2004).

A lot of research has shown that “the teaching of a foreign language at school gives pride of place to proficiencies under the oral code and understanding in particular” (Beaucamp, 2006, p. 53) (Note 6). However, very few of EFL learners manage to develop their oral communication ability regarding their target language. To make up for this problem, it is vital that “the teacher favors the exposure of his/her learners in a rich input by promoting the subconscious learning of their target language” (Ibid). This

requires significant use of the outer part of the ear canal and high exposure to the target language in any way to release among EFL learners a learning through impregnation that emphasizes empirical acquisition (Beaucamp, 2006, p. 54).

The present study through the *listening in mute* approach it addresses aims then to provide second or foreign language learners with a new learning strategy that could help them have a good command of their target language. Generating from this purpose, the present study attempts to answer the following questions:

- Is there any relationship between the subconscious and language acquisition process?
- To what extent can the *listening in mute* approach help in foreign language learning?

1.2 Review of Related Literature

The notions of language acquisition or subconscious learning (genuine learning) and language learning (conscious learning) as elaborated by Krashen (1981, 1983, 1985) are not perceived in the same way by linguists. While some agree with Krashen that these two processes are independent others contend that we cannot learn a language without acquiring it. They believe that “learning” can never become “acquisition” (Gregg, 1984, p. 94).

However, as pointed out by Haynes (2005, para. 2), “children acquire language through a subconscious process during which they are unaware of grammatical rules”. In other words, they get any language in the same way as they acquire their first language. Therefore, to command a language, learners need to adopt a learning process that mirrors the one used by children. And to get there, they “need a source of natural communication” (Ibid). Since language learning is not communicative but “...the result of direct instruction in the rules of language..., ...it is certainly not an age-appropriate activity for young/adult learners” (Ibid, para. 3). Through the language learning process, learners have “...conscious knowledge of the new language and can talk about that knowledge; they can fill in the blanks on a grammar page” (Ibid). Nevertheless, a lot of research has proved that “knowing grammar rules does not necessarily result in good speaking or writing” (Ibid). As added by Haynes (Ibid), “a student who has memorized the rules of the language may be able to succeed on a standardized test of English language but may not be able to speak or write (it) correctly”.

According to André Comte-Sponville (2001, p. 127) (Note 7), the term consciousness is one of the most difficult words to define. As the Bible says and reported by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood (Note 8)—According to Dict Box (2015), “Conscience is the knowledge that someone is watching; it is the sense of right and wrong”.

In the psychological sense of the term, Christian Godin (2004) defines consciousness as “la relation intériorisée immédiate ou médiate qu’un être est capable d’établir avec le monde où il vit ou avec lui-même” (Note 9). In the moral sense, he defines it as “la capacité mentale à porter des jugements de valeur moraux ... sur des actes accomplis par soi ou par autrui” (Note 10).

Otherwise, as pointed out by the hypnotherapist Carole Fortin (n.d.) (Note 11), “the subconscious is separated from the conscious and has its own operating modes”. She contends that “the subconscious perceives, thinks and reacts autonomously” and that “the power of the subconscious mind, at some level, is higher than that of the conscious mind as it constitutes 90% of our overall functioning”. She adds that “the subconscious is essentially programmed” and that it would be “impossible for (it) not to be programmed, because of all the impressions that have already been recorded since the intrauterine period”. Therefore, everyone is ineluctably programmed. Carole Fortin (n.d.), in her article “Le fonctionnement du subconscient” also explains that paradoxically, without “any program” the subconscious can do nothing and that it is only the conscience which can provide it with one. In other words, the conscience dictates to the subconscious what to do. The subconscious, according to Fortin (n.d.), “has a relentless logic (like a computer); it both accepts any suggestion or any programs indifferently and implements them blindly” without reasoning because it knows what is best for each individual. Once an idea is accepted by it, it begins to put it into practice; (because) words have a very strong power in the subconscious, (basically) the words we hear and our own inner monologue (Fortin, n.d.). At this level, “the subconscious is a prodigious amplifier; it takes the words literally (at face value)” (Ibid), to transmit them to the conscience as they were received.

Thus, contrary to what a lot of people think, during sleep, the brain is still in action through an interchange mechanism between the conscious and the subconscious. In other words, the conscious tends to make way for the subconscious that has an easier memorization ability.

Many research endeavors about memory have been conducted over the last 50 years. At the end of the 20th century, many studies such as those of the Bulgarian Gregory Lozanov and the French Guy Poursin have shown that the brain (memory especially) has an almost unlimited learning capacity. Professor Lozanov, with his method of learning through the Saturation of the two cerebral hemispheres named “suggestopedia” has showed that if we lift inhibitions (blockages of all kinds such as fears, doubts, feelings of inferiority accumulated throughout life) which are often linked to our unconscious or subconscious, so the memory can be increased tenfold. Lozanov is thus one of the first researchers to develop an effortless language learning technique. Through his method of super learning, Lozanov has discovered that one could “immerse” students in an intermediate state of consciousness (between wakefulness and sleep) while maintaining a sufficient level of vigilance so that they get the courses without the risk of falling asleep.

Similarly, Guy Poursin, by drawing on the *phosphenisme* technique which was elaborated by Dr. Francis Lefebvre, developed a form of school learning support based on light called the *luminopélagogie*. To address the same issue, the author of the present study has developed the *listening in mute* approach inspired by the works of the two aforementioned authors.

1.3 Theoretical Framework of the Study: The Concept of the Listening in Mute

Have you ever had a sensation of a *déjà-vu* or “already heard”? Have you ever, as a foreign language learner, felt like knowing a word or phrase that you cannot remember the way you come across it?

Sometimes, the foreign language learner suddenly sees during a reading or a discussion, the meaning of certain words or expressions never encountered by him/her before but which, however, seem so familiar to him/her. This state of affairs is due to the subconscious which has the ability to fly like a bird and to go in search of knowledge or information.

Everybody is endowed with a consciousness and a subconscious that at first sight give the impression of alternating though they work simultaneously. In other words, even in the conscious state, the subconscious works. With its ability to travel far from the individual in whom it exists, the subconscious mind has the faculty of recording everything in its path. Unlike the consciousness, the subconscious refuses nothing. It accepts everything, whatever its nature. It can go anywhere at any time. In its universe, nothing is too difficult. Everything can be accomplished.

It is a dimension in which pain does not exist. This facilitates the assimilation of information without the knowledge of the individual. Everything that is difficult to do in the consciousness becomes easy in the subconscious. Similarly, everything that is repressed by the consciousness will directly bury itself into the subconscious to return one day or another violently in the consciousness. When the information is buried in an individual's subconscious database, this one has the impression of forgetting it until the day the subconscious decides to send it back to his/her consciousness by allowing him/her this way to remember it again. In the database of the consciousness, everything is done systematically by sorting. The information that would not have been able to survive this sorting will automatically be sent to the subconscious that will keep it as long as possible. In this situation, the buried information could have two different ends. It can be referred back to the consciousness by the subconscious when the individual would find him/herself in a similar situation which would make him/her have memories. It can also be sent into the consciousness through the subconscious after a very long moment of lethargy in it, which gives the individual, who has had time to forget it because of the storage of several pieces of information of this kind, the impression of a *déjà vu*. This impression can also be caused by another phenomenon; that of the "the sleeping consciousness" in which this research work is particularly interested. While an individual is sleeping, his/her consciousness enters a form of torpor and thus allows his/her subconscious to take over. But the individual can return to the consciousness at any moment by a simple "whiplash" materialized by the end of a sleep cycle, a nightmare, a music, a violent noise, a change of temperature, etc. Once awakened, the individual, in a particular situation, may feel like having already experienced, learned, seen or simply been aware of certain information or situations that she/he is confronted with at this particular point in the time. This is due to the rejection of the information recorded by the subconscious of that individual during one of his/her many periods of sleep in his/her consciousness at the precise moment when the latter is confronted with a similar situation. This also gives the impression of a *déjà vu*.

What is interesting in these abilities which every single individual possesses is that, even in the state of sleep, the consciousness remains always on the alert, so awake. While the subconscious takes possession of the individual at 75%, the consciousness remains awake at 25%, which explains why an

individual in his/her sleep is propelled into a free fall, she/he wakes up before falling. This also explains the fact that one can respond to his/her interlocutor even in a deep sleep. There would, therefore, be some interference between the consciousness and the subconscious. There is a reason to believe that during sleep, there comes a time when the consciousness merges with the subconscious but to varying degrees. In sleep, the consciousness that is largely dominated by the subconscious nevertheless arrives to record a large amount of information without difficulty, which would facilitate the learning of foreign languages. To prove this hypothesis, a series of experiments was carried out on a number of learners of English as a foreign language.

Indeed, seven intermediate EFL learners agreed to take part in the experiment for a period of six months. It was recommended to each of them to take the habit of listening to a radio turned on all night long and tuning it to a channel broadcasting English programs while sleeping. To facilitate the action of the subconscious on their consciousness, it was recommended to them to turn low the volume of their radio set. For the phenomenon of “the sleeping consciousness” to be realized effectively during sleep, it is very important not to make too much noise around oneself; which clearly constitutes a necessary condition for the realization of this experience, lest it disturbs the sleep of others.

2. Methodology of the Study

2.1 The Research Participants

The seven intermediate EFL learners who volunteered to participate in the study were recruited from three English Language Clubs which “are learning crucibles where English is practised effectively...” (Zounhin, 2017, p. 19). There were four males and three females. Their age ranged from 16 to 27 years old. Four of them (3 males and 1 female) were in upper 6th and lower 6th grade (Première and Terminale in the French educational system) and three (1 male and 2 females) were undergraduates. All of them have less than a two month experience of language oriented Extracurricular Activities (ECAs) such as the English Language Clubs they have lately discovered and started participating in, hoping to practise and gain more flexibility as well as fluency in their target language.

2.2 Research Instruments

Research Instruments are testing devices or research tools designed to measure a given phenomenon or study and obtain data on a topic of interest from research subjects. To test the hypothesis of the present study, a multiple case study has been adopted. The reason why this research method has been adopted to the present study is that “a multiple case study can allow the researcher to analyze within each setting and across settings while a holistic case study with embedded units only allows her/him to understand one unique/extreme/critical case” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 550). As pointed out by these researchers, “the evidence created from case study design is considered robust and reliable” (Ibid). Furthermore, Baxter and Jack (2008, p. 548) referring to Yin (2003) contend that “a multiple case study enables the researcher to explore differences within and between cases”.

Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 25; cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008) define a case as, “a phenomenon of

some sort occurring in a bounded context”. They add that it is “in effect, your unit of analysis” (1994, p. 25). Merriam (1998, p. 27) views a case as “an individual, a program, a class or students, a school, or a community”. Besides, a case study is an empirical research method and one of the qualitative approach to inquiry. It is “a methodological approach that involves the in-depth exploration of a specific bounded system, utilizing multiple forms of data collection to systemically gather information on how the system operates or functions” (Linda, 2010, p. 1). The case in the present study has to do with the evaluation of an instructional program (the *listening in mute* approach) which was evaluated on different EFL learners. Through the use of this approach, the present study assesses the positive effect of the subconscious in foreign language acquisition.

For the sake of case study research limitation and to ensure that this study remains reasonable in its scope, only seven Beninese Intermediate EFL learners participated in the survey. Therefore, to examine how the program (case) that is under investigation operates in the different individual students who participated in the experiment, this study that was primarily designed as a single case study turns to a multiple-case one. From there on, it was important to “compare between cases (each participant) and answer a question that seeks to explain a presumed causal link in real-life interventions that are too complex for the present survey” (Yin, 2003; cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 547).

To achieve a holistic understanding of the beliefs of the intermediate EFL learners who participated in the experiment about the *listening in mute* educational program, a variety of ethnographic research techniques have been used. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Before each interview, the informant was reminded of the aim of the study and the reason why she/he was being interviewed. The scope of the interviews was also kept open and flexible with few interruptions. Informants were usually interviewed in a relatively quiet environment at agreed moments and locations to enable the researcher to get a considerable amount of descriptive data on their own perceptions and understanding of the *listening in mute* approach. The informal interview questions that were addressed to the informants varied from one respondent to another and were not pre-determined as the semi-structured ones. Both types of interview questions were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The use of focus groups method as a data collection technique also helps the different procedures used in the present research study to increase the validity of the research findings. When conducting the focus group discussions, each group was kept focused on the issue of their experience of the *listening in mute* approach. The collection of data from each of the two focus groups lasted from 40 to 60 minutes and those data were transcribed verbatim for analysis. All the participants enjoyed the experiment about this learning approach and were very enthusiastic to talk about their experience. Therefore, no information concerning their identity is provided in the study. Pseudonyms are used to refer to them (See Table 1).

Table 1. Overview of the Participants in the Individual Interviews and the Focus Groups

Group	Name	Gender	Age	School grade	ELC's name	Proficiency level in English
One	Aminata	Female	21	Undergraduate (First year at the English Department)	Titigweti English Club (Venue: University of Abomey-Calavi, Benin)	Intermediate
	Dossou	Male	20	Upper 6th	Afro-Dream English Club (Venue: CEG Godomey)	Intermediate
	Cokou	Male	18	Lower 6th	English Community Oasis Club (Venue: College Martin Luther King of Cotonou, Benin)	Intermediate
	Assiba	Female	16	Lower 6th	Afro-Dream English Club (Venue: CEG Godomey)	Pre-intermediate
Two	Codjovi	Male	19	Upper 6th	English Community Oasis Club (Venue: College Martin Luther King of Cotonou, Benin)	Intermediate
	Dossi	Female	23	Undergraduate (Second year at the English Department)	Titigweti English Club (Venue: University of Abomey-Calavi, Benin)	Intermediate
	Amàd é	Male	27	Undergraduate (Third year at the English Department)	Lodestar English club (Benin American Language Center of Cotonou)	Post-Intermediate

2.3 Validity and Reliability

A panel of judges consisting of three academic University instructors and two secondary school instructors was asked to evaluate the validity of the questionnaire items used for the study. Moreover, the research questions and variables (Note 12) of interest (the *listening in mute* approach as dependent variables (Note 13) and the respondents' background information, opinions about the *listening in mute* approach as independent variables (Note 14)) came from the review of related literature to develop construct validity.

Many sources of evidence have been used in data collection, across half a year time period. The planning of interviews and focus groups such as the participants' identities which were kept anonymous for ethical reasons in this study were all cross-matched with the research questions and variables of interest. All that has been recorded and reported was checked to guarantee a precise representation of

experiences of the respondents who were all orally informed in advance about the aims of the study before volunteering to engage in it. All the respondents for the interviews and focus groups were allowed to read and review the transcripts of their statements. As pointed out by Baxter and Jack (2008, p. 550) “(all) the evidence created (through the data collection of the present) case study design is considered robust and reliable”.

2.4 Procedures Used to Analyze the Data Collected from the Survey

To analyze the data collected from the individual interviews and focus groups, inductive analysis strategy similar to the one used by researchers such as Bodgan and Biklen (1992) and Davis (1995) was also adopted. This approach focuses on the thorough description, analysis, and interpretation of data. It first deals with the coding of the data, their classification into a descriptive group and the identification of the points and traits that emanate from them and which define the respondents’ perceptions, beliefs, points of views and attitudes. In this study, data were collected and analyzed simultaneously.

This simultaneous analysis procedure helped to determine the points and traits emanating from the data. It comprises the following five tasks: (1) first-cut analysis, (2) coding, (3) grouping, (4) determination of the correlations, (5) presentation of the traits (Freeman, 1998, pp. 82-119).

3. Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation of the Results

3.1 Interviews

Freeman (1998, p. 216) describes interview as a “structured oral exchange with someone”. Wang (2009) by referring to Duff and Yin (2008, 2009) points out that “it is an essential and commonly used source of case study evidence” (p. 76). According to Spradley (1979), an ethnographic interview is “a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants” (p. 58).

To probe the informants developing views about autonomous language learning through the *listening in mute* program, interviews have been used. The data collected through the different individual interviews are analyzed and presented in Table 2.

In sum, most of the respondents mentioned that the *listening in mute* program helped them to learn a considerable number of words and expressions within the half a year time period that the experiment has lasted. Each of them confessed that this approach enabled them to develop their listening and decoding skills. Some even mentioned that it made the English language look all of a sudden more familiar to them. Some others argued that it made easier English vocabulary learning and word pronunciation. They added that this program puts students in a learning situation that approximates the one of the native speakers or the one that enables a child to acquire a language instinctively. All of them pointed out that it enables the learner to remember words which she/he has heard and which she/he has never seen before in a written form.

These results suggest that the core center of this approach is the subconscious which operates simultaneously with the consciousness even though during sleep time, the latter looks inactive. This

implies that there is a relationship between the subconscious and the process of language acquisition which occurs not only through the simultaneous action of the subconscious and the consciousness but more in the state of unconsciousness.

3.2 Results of the Cross-Case Analysis

One of the features of multiple case studies has to do with the fact that they enable to examine the differences and similarities that result from the analysis of individual cases. The cross-case analysis of the subjects' stated beliefs suggests the following two major trends as those that are consistent with their perceptions about the effectiveness of the *listening in mute* approach.

- 1) The first common opinion of the seven subjects regarding the effectiveness of the *listening in mute* approach relates to the development of the listening and decoding skills. All of them believed that this approach is a facilitative program that helped each of them to develop pronunciations skills. They argued that it makes easier English vocabulary learning and word pronunciation.
- 2) The second common opinion of the seven subjects regarding the effectiveness of the *listening in mute* approach relates to the fact that it puts the learner in a learning situation that is similar to the one of the child. All of them believed that through the action of the subconscious, it enables the learner to get a lot of words and expressions never seen by him/her before in a written form.

3.3 Focus Groups

One of the general principles to consider when designing a focus group is the number of participants per group which approximately ranges from 6 to 10 people, who share similar characteristics or common interests. However, as pointed out by Cohen and Crabtree (2006) when referring to Morgan (1996), "there may be reasons to have smaller or slightly larger groups" (para. 3). To get the views of each of the 7 respondents of the experiment about the *listening in mute* approach, they have been split into two groups. The first group consisted of 4 learners (2 males and 2 females), the second group was made up of 3 learners (2 males and 1 female).

3.4 Responses to Focus Group Questions

Of the six focus group questions that were asked to the EFL learners, only the responses provided to two of them by those participants are worth mentioning in the present research work.

- 1) To the question: "*How can you describe the listening in mute approach?*", most of the participants involved in each focus group pointed out that the *listening in mute* approach is a program that helps learners remember words and expressions they have heard once and which they have never seen before in a written form. Commenting on the positives of this program, some of them declared: "It is a program that may help the EFL learner overcome the hindrances to a normal speech by acquiring words, native accent, interjections, and expressions intuitively". "It puts learners in a learning situation that approximates the one of the native speakers or the one that enables a child to acquire a language instinctively".
- 2) To the question: "*What kind of language skills have you improved through your participation in this experiment?*", most of the subjects mentioned that they have improved their listening skills. Some

added that they have developed decoding and pronunciation skills. They stated: “During reading activities, I succeed in decoding and pronouncing properly many difficult words now. Sometimes, I even have the impression of having already seen them before; which, in fact, is not the case”.

3.5 Summary of the Cross-Analysis of the Data Collected from the Two Focus Groups

The cross-analysis of the data collected from the participants in each of the two focus groups suggests the following three major trends as those that were consistent with their perceptions about the effectiveness of the *listening in mute* approach.

- 1) The first common opinion of all the subjects from the two focus groups relates to the development of their listening and pronunciation skills. Most of them believed that the *listening in mute* approach has helped them enhance their ability to decode English words and expressions properly. Some mentioned that after their experienced this program, there are many words that sound from now on familiar to them; words or expressions that they have never seen before in a written form.
- 2) The second common opinion of those subjects relates to the fascinating way with which they could acquire their target language. They all believed that through the action of the subconscious, the *listening in mute* approach makes easier language vocabulary learning and word pronunciation.
- 3) The third common opinion expressed by those subjects relates to the development of their self-confidence. They all believed that the development of their decoding ability through the use of the *listening in mute* approach produced among them more autonomy or self-confidence. They mentioned that the fact that they could now decode more easily words and expressions used by a native speaker or any English speaker makes them feel more interested in their target language learning.

To summarize, in light of all the above, we can say that the experience of the *listening in mute* approach has effectively helped learners to develop their listening skills and other abilities such as the decoding and the pronunciation. This shows that this program helps in foreign language learning. It enables EFL learners to expand their knowledge in English.

Similarly, the analysis of the results obtained from individual interview questions as well as the one of those provided by the respondents to focus group questions revealed that there is a relationship between the subconscious and language acquisition process. They showed that through the action of the subconscious, the *listening in mute* approach enables the EFL learner to develop listening and decoding skills. This proves that the objective of the present study (see section 1 or section 1.1) has been met and that it supports the starting hypothesis of the study (see section 1.3).

Table 2. Presentation and Analysis of the Data Collected through the Different Individual Interviews

Case study	Background Information	Description of the <i>Listening in mute</i> approach	Opinions about the <i>Listening in mute</i> approach	Analysis and Interpretation
N°1: Aminata	She was 21 years old and in first year at the English Department of the University of Abomey-Calavi in the Republic of Benin. To improve her English language, she has decided to join, two weeks before the experiment of the <i>Listening in mute</i> approach, one of the English language Clubs of her University (the Titigweti English Club). Before experiencing the <i>low volume listening</i> approach, she was used to complaining of not having a good strategy to learn new words.	She believes that the <i>listening in mute</i> approach facilitates language learning and helps learners to develop their listening skills. She regards this program as being suitable for foreign language learners who most of the time struggle to learn new words which are difficult to pronounce and memorize. She stated, "It enables the learner to remember of words he has heard and which he has never seen before in written form".	She believes that the program helped her to learn a considerable number of words within the half-year time period that has lasted the experiment. She stated, "Thanks to this approach, I developed my listening skills and suddenly realized one day, during the second month of the experimentation that I could partly understand the news presented on the BBC's radio channel". "This technique makes the English language look all of a sudden more familiar to me".	The analysis of responses provided by the case study N°1 to open-ended and closed-ended questions during the interview session showed that the <i>listening in mute</i> approach has a positive impact on her English language learning. They demonstrated that the <i>low volume listening</i> approach has the ability of developing the learner's listening and decoding skills through the action of the subconscious. These results suggest that there is a relationship between the subconscious and the process of language acquisition.
N°2: Dossou	He was 20 years old and in upper 6 th (Terminale in the French educational system) at the General Educational School of Godomey (CEG Godomey). Before he experienced the <i>listening in mute</i> approach, he only had a three weeks experience of language oriented Extracurricular Activities such as the one of his school (the Afro-Dream English Language Club) in which he has decided to join so that to widen his knowledge in English. He has used in the past, many memorizing strategies in vain. However, he remained optimistic to this regard hoping to discover the best approach at the proper time. This explains his willingness to participate	He perceives the program as an approach that enables learners to practice a variety of skills such as listening (words decoding) and pronunciation (accent, intonation and words articulation). Commenting on this aspect, he said: "The <i>listening in mute</i> program is a very interesting approach and highly practical for foreign language learning". "It is a program that may help the EFL learner overcome the hindrances to a normal speech by acquiring words, native accent, interjections, and	"This is a miracle approach," he said. He further mentioned the following statement: It's strange what happened to me one day while I was experiencing it. I, who could not understand anything about what is said on the BBC radio channel, suddenly realized, one day when I woke up, that I could understand the majority of what was saying. It is to believe that during my sleep, something came to unbind my ears. It is as if English was a language that I had always mastered. What surprised me most was that I could also decode the interjections used by the speakers.	The analysis of responses provided by the case study N°2 to open-ended and closed-ended questions during the interview session after the six-month experiment on the <i>listening in mute</i> approach revealed that this program has the ability to help the learner learn his target language intuitively. This suggests through an action of the subconscious, the <i>listening in mute approach</i> enables the learner to develop listening, decoding and pronunciation skills.

	in the survey.	expressions intuitively”.		
N 3: Cokou	He was 18 years old and in lower 6 th (Première in the French educational system) at College Martin Luther King of Cotonou, Benin. To improve his oral communication and listening skills, he has decided to join the English Community Oasis Club which is the only language oriented Extracurricular Activities of his school. He had always learned news words by heart and found this technique very irksome. Since he wanted to vary it with a new one, he volunteered to participate in this study. He also expected that this experimentation gives him the chance to discover a new self-learning technique that could help him improve his academic performance.	He believes that the <i>listening in mute</i> approach is an effortless language learning technique that enables learners to develop their listening and pronunciation skills. He said: “it is a program that is designed to make EFL students learn their target language in a natural way without any effort”. “This approach may help EFL learners acquire the English language in the same way as native speakers”. “It does not require the presence of a teacher and makes, therefore, foreign language learning comfortable”.	“This self-learning approach is fascinating,” he said. He believes that it makes easier language vocabulary learning and word pronunciation. He stated, “Thanks to this approach, there are many words and expressions that I have never seen in written form before and which I can decode and pronounce easily now”. “With the <i>listening in mute</i> technique, the learner does not have to make too much effort before acquiring her or his target language”. “By adopting this strategy, the EFL learner will realize one day that he could speak English instinctively”.	The analysis of the answers provided by the case study N 3 to the open-ended and closed-ended questions asked to him during the interview session that follows the half-year time period experiment on the <i>listening in mute</i> approach showed that this program put the learner in a learning situation that is similar to the one of the child. It makes the learner’s mind work as the one of a child. This suggests then that this <i>low volume listening</i> approach impacts positively on the learner through the action of the subconscious.
N 4: Assiba	She was 16 years old and in lower 6 th (Première in the French educational system) at the General Educational School of Godomey (CEG Godomey). Before she experienced the <i>listening in mute approach</i> , she only had a one week experience of language oriented Extracurricular Activities. Indeed, to improve her academic performance and develop her listening and speaking skills, she has decided to join the English Language Circle of her school (the Afro-Dream English Language Club).	She perceives the program as an approach that enables learners to develop listening (words decoding) and pronunciation skills. She stated, “The <i>listening in mute</i> approach is a self-learning technique that helps the EFL learner getting used to native speakers’ accent and develop the ability to decode words or phrases used by a speaker”. “It is an approach which enables to estimate the value or action of the subconscious in language learning”.	By referring to the impact of the <i>listening in mute</i> approach on her language skills, she pointed, “Based on my experience of the <i>listening in mute</i> approach I can confess that learning English in a foreign language setting is more than ever possible”. “It is a program that helps EFL learners learning their target language intuitively”. “Thanks to this program, I can decode more easily now the words and expressions used by a native speaker”.	Based on the responses provided by the case study N 4 to the questions posed to her during the interview session, it can be suggested that the <i>listening in mute</i> approach has a positive impact on language learning. Through the action of the subconscious, this program enables the EFL learner to develop listening and decoding skills.
N 5:	He was 19 years old and in upper 6 th	He believes that the <i>listening in</i>	He believes that the <i>listening in mute</i>	Based on the different responses provided by

Codjovi	(Terminale in the French educational system) at College Martin Luther King of Cotonou, Benin. Since he did not have a good background knowledge in English, he has decided to join the English Community Oasis Club which is the only language oriented Extracurricular Activities of his school. He just has two weeks experience of this out-of-classes' activity before participating in the present study.	<i>mute</i> approach is an outstanding program that makes learners acquire language competence through the action of their subconscious. He asserted, "this program puts students in a learning situation that approximates the one of the native speakers or the one that enables a child to acquire a language instinctively".	program helped him develop considerably his listening skills within the half-year time period that has lasted the experiment. He stated, "The <i>soft listening</i> approach really impacted on my listening ability. Thanks to it, there are many words that sound familiar to me from now on; words or expressions that I have never seen before in the written form".	the case study N°5 to the open-ended and closed-ended questions posed to him during the interview session, it can be suggested that the <i>soft listening</i> approach helps the student learn the language instinctively. Moreover, since it deals with the action of the subconscious, it enables the learner to get a lot of words and expressions never seen by this one before in written form.
N°6: Dossi	She was 23 years old and in second year at the English Department of the University of Abomey-Calavi in the Republic of Benin. To develop her speaking and learning skills, she has decided to join one of the English language Clubs of her University (the Titigweti English Club). She just has one month and a half experience of this English-related Extracurricular Activity the time she was participating in this study. Before taking part in the study, she was not able to decode or get the meaning of the words and expressions used by her interlocutors or native speakers such as the ones she could hear when listening to English radio channels.	She believes that the <i>listening in mute</i> approach is really appropriate for foreign language learning. She pointed out that "it is an approach that makes the subconscious learn the language instead of the learner and send later on the knowledge acquired by the subconscious to the conscious of this one". "Through this learning process, there is a reason to believe that the subconscious and the conscious are used simultaneously". "However, even if we realize that during sleep the subconscious has an ascendant on the conscious, those two phenomena operate simultaneously".	She believes that the program is an original one. She stated: Over time, I realized that there were a lot of words I was able to decode even though there were many of them of which I did not know the meaning. This often led me to refer to the dictionary in order to learn more about each of them. However, there are many words that I did not know before and which found themselves overnight in my English vocabulary background. I confess that I have never seen them in written form before. But surprisingly enough, I could understand their meaning. And all this has been possible since the day I began to experience this approach.	The analysis of the answers provided by the case study N°6 to the open-ended and closed-ended questions asked to her during the interview session that follows the half-year time period experiment on the <i>listening in mute</i> approach has given extensive information. It showed that the core center of the <i>low volume listening</i> approach is the subconscious which operates simultaneously with the conscious even though during sleep time, the latter looks inactive. This suggests that language acquisition occurs not only through the simultaneous action of the subconscious and the consciousness but more in the state of unconsciousness.
N°7: Amàdé	He was 27 years old and in the third year at the English Department of the University of Abomey-Calavi in the	He believes that the <i>listening in mute</i> approach is a well-structured program that	By referring to the impact of the <i>listening in mute</i> approach on his English language competence, he pointed:	Based on the responses provided by the case study N°7 to the open-ended and closed-ended questions posed to him during the interview

Republic of Benin. He only had one month experience of language oriented Extracurricular Activities (ECAs) and to improve his English language, has decided to join one of them (the Titigweti English Club).	helps learners develop listening skill and widen their vocabulary background. He asserted, "this program puts students in a learning situation which is similar to the one that allows an individual to acquire his mother's tongue".	Based on my experience of this program, I can admit that it has developed my listening and decoding abilities. During my reading activities, I succeed in pronouncing properly many difficult words now. Sometimes, I even have the impression of having already seen them before. But where? I cannot say it.	session, it can be suggested that the <i>listening in mute</i> approach, a part from developing the learner's listening and decoding skills, makes the subconscious of this one acquire the language instead of himself. Once awake, the information got by the subconscious of this learner is assigned to his consciousness.
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4. Discussion of the Results

Second or foreign language learning is a task that is mainly dreaded by learners. The different problems experienced by them are related to the type of learning process they use. To be successful, second or foreign language learners should adopt the same process as that the child goes through when she/he acquires his/her first language. As argued by Haynes (2005), in her article "Language Acquisition vs. Language Learning", according to linguists, there is a considerable nuance between language acquisition and language learning. Whereas for them, the first one is "the product of a subconscious process very similar to the process children undergo when they acquire their first language" (Krashen, 1982, p. 10), the second one is "the product of formal instruction (that) comprises a conscious process which results in conscious knowledge 'about' the language, for example, knowledge of grammar rules" (Krashen, 1982; cited in Schütz, 2007).

Therefore, while some (Schmidt, 1990, 1995, 2001) consider that conscious understanding of the target language process is imperative if learners have to make correct forms and use them suitably, others such as Seliger (1983) and Lyons (1986) strongly assume that language learning is basically unconscious. Seliger claims that "obviously, it is at the unconscious level that language learning takes place" (Seliger, 1983, p. 187).

Similarly, as Seliger (1983), the linguist Stephen Krashen, in his theory of *Acquisition-Learning*, contends that "learning" is less important than "acquisition" (Krashen, 1982). He says that language is assimilated through an instinctive, automatic and subconscious way of which the learner need not be conscious (Krashen, 2003). Thus, by setting up the *listening in mute* (*low volume listening* or *soft listening*) approach developed in the present study, the researcher who supports the theory of Krashen (1982), expects to give EFL learners, the chance to acquire their target language in the same way as they assimilate their first language or mother tongue.

Indeed, the analysis of the responses provided by the participants in the present study to open-ended and close-ended questions asked to them through individual interviews and focus groups showed that the *listening in mute* approach is an effortless language learning technique that enables learners to develop their listening and pronunciation skills. By adopting this approach, learners develop their decoding skills. They succeed in figuring out as children "most words they have heard but have never

seen in (a) written form... (They develop the ability to) sound out most words they are not familiar with at all..." (Oxford University Press ELT, 2012).

Comprehension = Decoding Skills + Language Skills. So, by developing their decoding and listening skills, learners gain more understanding in their target language. The notion of decoding as discussed by Reading Horizons (2006-2017), is:

The process of translating print into speech by rapidly matching a letter or combination of letters (graphemes) to their sounds (phonemes) and recognizing the patterns that make syllables and words. There is an area in the brain that deals with language processing and does this process automatically. Unfortunately, about 30 percent of students do not access this part of their brain and therefore must be taught decoding strategies very explicitly and systematically (or be helped by an appropriate program).

As far as listening is concerned, it is "the most essential skills needed by all of us and the hardest thing in the world" (Palit, 2013). According to the International Listening Association, "Listening is the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or non-verbal messages" (Cabrera, 2012). Johnson (1951) defines it as "the ability to understand and respond effectively to oral communication" (p. 58). Based on those definitions we can assert that hearing is not *listening*. As Davis (1977) observes, "Hearing is with the ears, but listening is with the mind" (p. 385). According to the Elmhurst College Learning Center cited in (Cabrera, 2012), "Hearing is the first stage of listening. (It) occurs when our ears pick up sound waves which are then transported to our brain. Listening is a communicative (or) active process...". Simply put, we listen with the mind and we hear with the senses (Cabrera, 2012). Listening is done through a conscious process whereas hearing is done through an unconscious process.

On the other hand, while "listening is to understand meaning only, without the need to translate; decoding is to translate or to understand meaning and importance" (Cabrera, 2012). We can then say that "Listening is an active process of eliciting information by decoding (translating) the code (and that) Hearing is a passive process of absorbing information" (Cabrera, 2012).

Tanway (2015) identifies five types of listening:

- **Pseudo listening:** Pretending to listen but not really absorbing anything from the conversation. Sometimes, the information we receive is something we just do not want to hear.
- **The appreciative listening:** Listening for pleasure and enjoyment, as when we listen to music, to a comedy or to an entertaining speech.
- **The emphatic listening:** Listening to provide emotional support for the speaker, as when a psychiatrist listens to a patient or when we lend a sympathetic ear to a friend.
- **The comprehensive/active listening:** Listening to understand the message of a speaker, as when we attend a classroom lecture or listen to directions for finding a friend's house.
- **The critical/analytical listening:** Listening to evaluate a message for purposes of accepting or rejecting it, as when we listen to the campaign speech of a political candidate or a salesperson.

Purani (2013) adds to these five types of listening three other ones which are as follows:

- **Precision listening:** Listening to single out one particular sound with exactness and clarity.
- **Discriminative listening:** Listening to distinguish between all the sounds in an environment
- **Social listening:** Listening with just enough effort to give a response.

Among these eight types of listening, the one in which the present study is particularly interested is the comprehensive or active listening. Once the learner has developed this ability, his/her speaking skill also emerges automatically. The opposite word of listening is talking. To become a good speaker we need to learn to listen. Listening is the first language ability we learn in our lives. It is thanks to it that we can acquire our first languages or mother tongues.

In summary, to command a second or foreign language, learners need to acquire it in the same way as they assimilate their first language. To help them succeed in this way, the *listening in mute* approach has been developed. By adopting this technique, they will realize over time that there are many words that they were able to decode even though the meaning of some of them sound unknown of them. This shows that there is a relationship between the subconscious and the process of language acquisition.

Learning a second or foreign language is not easy at all. Before getting a good command of a new language, the learner goes through many difficulties. One of them is the issue of decoding words and their meaning. They struggle to widen their vocabulary background because of the complexity of some of the words of their target language due to the multiplicity of their meanings. The learning by heart approach commonly adopted by those learners to learn new words has proved its limits among them. It was, therefore, necessary to think of setting up new techniques capable of overcoming these limits; new learning strategies through which the subconscious learning (genuine learning) could prevail over the language learning (conscious learning). Accordingly, the *listening in mute* approach has been elaborated. Through a series of experiments on seven intermediate EFL learners within half a year time period, to assess its effectiveness, this approach has proved to be very suitable for those learners. It has filled their expectations in terms of language acquisition. By listening to their radio turned on all night long on a channel broadcasting English-language programs while sleeping, learners at a given moment during this state enter in a form of hypnosis which allows them to acquire the language suitably.

Future researchers on language learning processes should attempt to explore other techniques that could help to better or supplement the *listening in mute* approach. They can also investigate with more details, the action of the subconscious during the process of language acquisition. Similarly, future research could include longitudinal studies to provide supportive evidence from the perceptions and beliefs of learners regarding the effects that their participation in the *listening in mute* programs have on their language acquisition. To help to generalize the findings of the present study, further research with a larger number of participants could also be considered.

Moreover, it would not be wise to close this research work without mentioning the limits in which it has been carried out and to give the definitions of some technical and standard words used in it.

5. Limitations to the Scope of the Study

The study has two important limitations which are presented as follows:

- Due to the limited access to the participants, analysis was based only upon the participants' self-report assessment.
- Due to the small number of participants in the study and their particular learning situation, generalizability is limited.

5.1 Definition of Few Terms

The following are proceeded from Thanajaro (2000, pp. 7-8).

- **English as a Foreign Language (EFL)** refers to the role of English in countries where it is taught as a subject in schools but not used as a medium of instruction in education nor as a language of communication in the country (e.g., in government, or business).
- **English as a Second Language (ESL)** refers to the role of English for immigrant and other minority groups in English-speaking countries. These people may use their mother tongue at home or among friends, but use English at school and at work.
- **First Language (L1)** refers to a learner's mother tongue. This term is used synonymously with native language.
- **Second Language (L2)** refers to the language that is learned or acquired through training. In the present study, the second language is the English language.
- **Suggestopedia** refers to a teaching method developed by Lozanov. It makes use of music, visual images, and relaxation exercises to make learning more comfortable and effective.
- **Target language** refers to the language being learned. In this study, the target language is the English language.

Besides, as defined by Zounhin (2017, p. 19):

- **English Language Clubs** are learning crucibles where English is practiced effectively... There are learning places where learners can have the chance to have one-to-one or group discussions with their peers without experiencing too much anxiety...

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Notes

Note 1. Since the term “**mute**” is often confusing, it is noteworthy to clarify its meaning in the present article. Therefore, in this document, it does not mean *dumb*, *speechless* or *not able to give out sound* but *soften*, *muffle*. It refers to the word “**sourdine**” which etymologically originates from the Italian word “*sordina*” between 1670 and 1680. Simply put, in this paper, the word “**mute**” means *to reduce the intensity of a sound, to deaden or muffle a sound, to lower the volume of an electronic device such as a radio set*.

Note 2. In this paper, the pronouns (**His**), (**Him**), (**He**) are sometimes used as neutral to address simultaneously the two genders (male and female).

Note 3. English Language Clubs which “are learning crucibles where English is practiced effectively...” (Zounhin, 2017, p. 19).

Note 4. “Part of the mind which operates below the level of consciousness; mental processes occurring outside of an individual’s awareness” (Dict Box, 2015). Dict Box (V11.8.1) is an English to French & French to English offline Dictionary & Translator, developed by Xung Le. For more details please Cf. <http://www.dictionarbox.com>

Note 5. More or less clear intuition of an individual to his mental state, his life and the world that surrounds him (Adapted from Descartes, 1937 reviewed in 1960).

Note 6. “L’ELVE (Enseignement d’une Langue Vivante Etrangère à l’Ecole) accorde une place de choix aux compétences relevant du code oral et à la compréhension en particulier...” (Beaucamp, 2006, p. 53).

Note 7. André Comte-Sponville (2001). *Dictionnaire de philosophie*. PUF, 2001.

Note 8. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 1) that was adopted on December 10, 1948, by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Note 9. “The immediate or mediate internalized relationship that a human being can establish with the world where he lives or with himself” (Adapted from Christian Godin, 2004).

Note 10. “The mental capacity to make moral value judgments...on acts done by oneself or by others” (Ibid).

Note 11. Carole Fortin (n.d). *Le fonctionnement du subconscient*. Aide Psychologique Rive-Sud. Retrieved July 25, 2016, from <http://www.aidepsychologique.com/articles/le-fonctionnement-du-subconscient/>

Note 12. According to McLeod (2008, para.1 and 2), “A variable is anything that can vary, i.e., change or be changed, such as memory, attention, and time are taken to perform a task, etc.”.

Note 13. “Dependent Variables are variables the experimenter measures, after making changes to the Independent variable that are assumed to affect the Dependent Variables” (McLeod, 2008, para. 1 and 2).

Note 14. “Independent Variables are variables the experimenter manipulates (i.e., changes)—assumed to have a direct effect on the Dependent Variable” (Ibid).

Appendix A

Interview Questionnaire Guide

The same process and set of questions were used to interview all candidates.

1. Background Information Review

Name:	Language skill to improve:
Gender:	Reason for studying English:
Age:	Length of time of English learning:
Proficiency level in English:	

2. Introduction and Purpose Of The Interview

1) Introduction

Good morning/afternoon ... (Name of the Interviewee). My name is ... Thank you for volunteering for this interview session.

2) Purpose of the interview

We are here today to talk about your perception about the listening in mute approach since you just experienced for a half-year period time. Although you have already been submitted to the completion of a questionnaire form to this regard, it is also crucial to gather additional information from you through one-to-one discussion. Therefore, the opportunity is given to you to support or change your mind regarding your first opinions about this experience. Simply put, the purpose of this interview session is to get your perceptions about the way this experience has impacted on your English learning. Thus, my objective is not to give you my opinion or share information with you. All that matters is your impressions. You will not be allowed to answer by Yes/No and Right/Wrong. However, you have the right to change your mind. Please feel comfortable to speak your mind.

3. Guiding or Exploration Questions

- 1) What do you think about the *listening in mute* approach?
- 2) How can you describe the *listening in mute* program?
- 3) What are the positive aspects of this program?
- 4) What kind of language skills have you improved through your experience of this approach?
- 5) What do you prefer or dislike about this self-learning approach?
- 6) Provide any other comments.

4. Conclusion

Thank you very much for your cooperation. Your comments have been very helpful.

Appendix B

Focus Group Questionnaire Guide

1. Introduction, Purpose, and Warning for the Focus Group

Hello, everyone! Glad to know that you have all volunteered to participate in this focus group. I know that you are all busy and give thanks for your time.

My name is ... and the one next to me is my colleague...

The objective of the present group discussion is to evaluate your perceptions and beliefs about the impact of the *listening in mute* program on your English language learning. It is true that you have already been submitted to the completion of a questionnaire form to this regard at the end of your six months' time experimentation on the program. It is also true that you have all been interviewed individually about that. However, your help is still required to gather more information about the real effect of this educational program on your English language acquisition. This group discussion will not last more than two hours.

Now may I audio-taped the discussion to make its retrospection easy? I ensure you that what you will be saying here will be kept secret till they are transcribed literally and destroyed.

Please note that you will not be allowed to answer by Yes/No and Right/Wrong. However, you have the right to change your mind. Please feel comfortable to speak your mind. There will be no particular order to have the floor. Just make sure that only one person speaks at a time. When you feel like saying something, please just go ahead! In addition, you do not need to share the same point of view with the other members of the group.

Does anyone have anything to say before we start? (If yes, please do!) If not, then I will ask my colleague to switch on the recorder.

2. Warming Up or Engagement Questions

First and foremost I would like everyone to introduce themselves. Introduce yourself to your neighbor and ask about her/his name, dream country, and hobbies. Now I will be giving you two minutes to remember your best achievement in English-learning since the time you have been introduced to the *listening in mute* approach (Something that you were not able to do in English and that you have succeeded in doing). Is there anyone ready to share her or his story?

3. Guiding Questions

- 1) How can you describe the *listening in mute* approach?
- 2) How do you feel today regarding your English language learning?
- 3) What kind of English language skills have you improved through your experience on the *listening in mute* approach?
- 4) What do you prefer or dislike the most about the *listening in mute* program?

5) What kind of strategy did you usually use before you experience, the *listening in mute* approach??

6) In addition to all we have been discussing so far, what else would you like to say in regard to your *listening in mute*'s experience?

4. Conclusion

Thanks a lot for taking part in successful focus groups. Your views will be very useful for the study.

The same process and set of questions were used for all the four focus groups.